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### **Benefit Rate Increase for Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Benefits**

The maximum daily benefit rate payable for claims under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act increases to \$43 from \$42, in the new benefit year which begins July 1, 1997. Benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in 14-day registration periods, so maximum benefits for biweekly claims will total \$430.

During the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are payable for each day of unemployment or sickness in excess of seven, rather than four, which, in effect, provides a one-week waiting period. Initial sickness claims must also begin with four consecutive days of sickness. However, only one waiting period is now required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year. Therefore, beneficiaries on the rolls will normally not be required to serve another waiting period because of the onset of the new benefit year.

To qualify for normal railroad unemployment or sickness benefits, an employee must have had railroad earnings of at least \$2,162.50 in calendar year 1996, not counting more than \$865 for any month. Those who were not employed in the rail industry before 1996 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 1996.

Under certain conditions, employees with 10 or more years of service, who do not qualify in the new benefit year on the basis of their 1996 earnings, may still be able to receive benefits after June 30, 1997. Ten-year employees who received normal benefits in the benefit year ending June 30, 1997, might still be eligible for extended benefits, and ten-year employees may be eligible for accelerated benefits if they have rail earnings of at least \$2,225 in 1997, not counting earnings of more than \$890 a month.

Application forms for unemployment and sickness benefits can be obtained from railroad employers, railroad labor organizations, any Railroad Retirement Board office, or the Board's Web Site at <http://www.rrb.gov>. Railroaders with questions about unemployment or sickness benefits should contact the nearest Board office. Most Board offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. In addition, information about benefit requirements, customer service standards, field office locations, and other topics can be accessed at anytime through the Board's Web Site.